



Pendlebury J, Veldpaus L.

[Heritage and Brexit.](#)

Planning Theory & Practice 2018

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2018.1428337>

Copyright:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Planning Theory & Practice* on 5th February 2018, available online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2018.1428337>

DOI link to article:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2018.1428337>

Date deposited:

09/02/2018

Embargo release date:

05 August 2019



This work is licensed under a

[Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International licence](#)

Comment Article

Heritage and Brexit

John Pendlebury, Loes Veldpaus

Global Urban Research Unit

School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape

Newcastle University

Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom

Correspondence details here including e-mail for the corresponding author:

John Pendlebury

Professor of Urban Conservation

Global Urban Research Unit

Claremont Tower, 4th floor

Newcastle University

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE1 7RU

Email: john.pendlebury@ncl.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0)191 222 6810

Heritage and Brexitⁱ

In what is traditionally known as ‘the west’, it feels like a very uncertain world at the moment and this has become manifest in the political processes of many European countries and the USA. Uncertainty has been created by structural changes in the global economy (‘globalisation’), enduring austerity politics following the financial crisis of 2008, climate change, refugee crises, and the impact of terrorism. In many countries there has been something of a retrenchment and reaction by politics against these global currents. This is manifest, for example, in elections in 2016 and 2017 in the United Kingdom, Austria, France, Germany and the Netherlands as well as most dramatically in the election of Donald Trump in the USA. As Heather Campbell (2016) wrote in this journal of Brexit, the momentous decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union following a referendum on 23 June 2016, if there is a common characteristic here it is that we are often seeing an ‘anti-vote’; an antagonism towards the established political class, ‘experts’ and the ‘liberal metropolitan elite’, often linked to a new wave of nationalism (Jennings & Stoker, 2017; Webber & Burrows, forthcoming; Winlow, Hall, & Treadwell, 2017, pp. 197–208). The vote arguably highlights deep cultural schisms within the UK. These are rooted in very different imaginaries of the past and their uses in the present. Brexit, we would argue, is therefore, alongside its other characteristics, very much a heritage project; that is, the past is used for contemporary purposes and as a future-making practice. This has implications for what heritage ‘is’ and what it does, in a post-Brexit country.

The Brexit process has generated a series of clichés that can be considered both vacuous

and difficult to pin down. Nevertheless, like most clichés they perhaps contain some kernel of an issue that is worth interrogating. Brexit clichés that have been widely reproduced include ‘we want our country back’ and ‘our once great country’. These are highly emotive and contentious phrases. They suggest a nostalgic social conservatism encompassing both a sense of loss and a sense of place (Clarke, 2016). They relate to a wish to recover an imaginary of a past that celebrates a de-problematised ‘great’ British national identity, without acknowledging the dark side of this history or the inequalities this still reproduces in contemporary society (May, 2017). Thus, Brexit presents potentially profound implications for how heritage might be defined and used in the future. Brexit-supporting politicians have sought to overtly mobilise heritage in Brexit politics, playing upon old referents in engendering new nationalisms. Right-wing commentators aim to give a respectable sheen to this insular and rather xenophobic construction of national identity by calling up a mythic past (e.g. Murray, 2017). References are made to Empire and the Commonwealth (even, absurdly, to ‘Empire 2.0’) as well as war-related tropes such as the Blitz, Nazis and so on as part of constructing an island nation identity; a project that has also been deliberately cultivated in the school curriculum by Conservative government ministers (Bhambra, 2013).

For heritage, this can be seen as taking things back to their roots. The rise of the modern conception of heritage is closely linked with the development of the modern nation state; heritage was part of the apparatus of defining national identity through a project of belonging and ‘othering’. Heritage is an integral part of what Benedict Anderson (1983) termed ‘Imagined Communities’ and the overt use of heritage in nation-building and nation-destruction has continued on the global stage through to modern times (e.g. Bevan, 2006). Yet over time, the heritage project has acquired a range of other instrumental roles. Specifically, in recent decades two larger, wider social, economic

and political forces have come into play in the practice of heritage that encompass but far transcend their impact on heritage alone and which, for shorthand, we have called ‘liberalism’ and ‘neo-liberalism’. Whilst the drive for these arises from very different social constituencies, they have both been facilitated by the partial collapse of the modernist project, which has enabled more heterogeneous approaches to heritage to take root.

The cultural turn in the social sciences originating in the 1970s with its challenge to scientific rationalism eventually filtered through to planning (see e.g. Rivero, 2017) and the heritage world (see e.g. Hewison, 1987; Lowenthal, 1985) and this led to a sustained critique of expert dominance of heritage definition and management (see e.g. Smith, 2006). This discourse of ‘liberalism’ has had implications for defining more pluralist conceptions of heritage, pushing the heritage sector to make efforts towards a wider social engagement beyond its historic audience. In the late 1990s/ early 2000s this was given impetus by the Labour Government that required all government departments to demonstrate their role in supporting a process of social inclusion (Pendlebury, Townshend, & Gilroy, 2004). Whilst the manifestation of this discourse has changed – the focus is now upon ‘diversity’ – the liberal discourse on heritage is very much alive both in the heritage sector and in relation to ‘hot’ heritage issues. For example, there are active campaigns to rename British places associated with figures prominent in the slave trade. It has been agreed, for instance, that, following a programme of refurbishment, Colston Hall in Bristol be renamed for this reason (Saner, 2017). At heart, such liberalism in the hands of policy-makers remains a nation-building agenda; but seeks to create new and more diverse definitions of national identity.

It was also in the 1970s that neo-liberal economic approaches began to be asserted and these have assumed dominance across much of Europe despite (indeed, reinforced by)

the global financial crisis and austerity. This has had significant direct and indirect consequences for heritage management processes. Directly, both government policy and market processes have led to a more overt commodification of heritage; we increasingly use and reify heritage as an economic good rather than protect it as a cultural good. Showcasing good practices of heritage-led regeneration usually means proving that heritage assets were instrumental in economic development. Indirectly, these processes have been accelerated in recent years by a desperation in many localities to capture any possible economic activity and, as a consequence of austerity, there is also a diminished capacity from the local state to manage change.

These philosophies, liberalism and neo-liberalism, are often in competition with each other, but they are also both outward-facing, cosmopolitan projects. In their very different ways they expose ideas of heritage, by breaking out of traditional conceptions of cultural worth and national identity and using it, on the one hand, as part of a political critique of traditional nationalism and, on the other, as a globalised economic commodity.

Returning to Brexit, such cosmopolitanism seems to have been a factor in the referendum result, with some commentators identifying a profound social schism at the heart of the divisive result. For example, David Goodhartⁱⁱ (2017) divides the British population between ‘somewheres’ and ‘anywheres’ⁱⁱⁱ; between the well-educated and cosmopolitan metropolitan elite (the ‘anywheres’) and an older, more provincial population (the ‘somewheres’) who feel out of step with social change and an image of modern Britain represented by the demographic change of immigration. These classifications are overly-simplistic but do pick up upon one strong theme characteristic of Brexit-discourse; that those disconnected from cosmopolitanism and globalisation, or having to deal with its unequal and unfair consequences, feel anger or resentment that

was articulated in the vote. This is as much a cultural disconnect as an economic one (see also Smith, 2017). Again, this is highly debateable, and other commentators have downplayed the significance of social division (Jones, 2017). Whatever the precise sociological reality, if we accept that one of the drivers for Brexit is social conservatism, that another is a reaction against some of the consequences of globalism and that there is a germ of truth in the idea of somewheres and anywheres, we can see that there is a potential tension between the values of the somewheres and the reformulations of heritage suggested by liberalism and neo-liberalism. Somewheres might perhaps be thought to relate more to traditional signifiers of heritage. Indeed, Goodhart argues it is precisely because of liberalism and neo-liberalism that a social schism has been created and a disconnection with the values of a substantial part of the population has occurred. If we give some credence to this view, what are the practical implications for heritage?

First, it would seem that liberal values are more immediately under-challenge than neo-liberal values; new nationalisms and anti-immigration discourses with concomitant antipathy to policies of diversity represent a major challenge to the liberal project, including in the heritage sector. Whilst most analysis would suggest neo-liberalism was the root cause of the global financial crisis, neo-liberal approaches have strengthened their grip on global politics and economics (Peck, Brenner, & Theodore, 2017) (although the surprisingly good performance of Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour in the UK 2017 General Election might be indicative of a swing of momentum). It is impossible to know exactly how challenges to a liberal agenda will come to ground or tangibly manifest themselves, but some challenge to the status quo seems inevitable. As a hint of what might be to come, some in the right-wing media were very critical of the National Trust's recent celebration of LGBTQ history on the 50th anniversary of the partial

decriminalisation of homosexuality (Delingpole, 2016) and more recently the suggestion that National Trust volunteers wear rainbow lanyards at one property led to a media storm (Pochin, 2017). If we acknowledge the role of heritage in the process of imagining and negotiating the future, what role do we want it to perform? And how should the heritage sector respond to this?

At its most anodyne, heritage can be presented as ‘a reassuringly warm and cuddly blanket’ (Ashworth, 2006; 393) by those seeking to sell heritage and those presenting a liberal affirming vision of heritage alike. This ignores the fact that heritage often has ugly and regressive sides, as shown by recent events in Charlottesville (Fortin, 2017). In the context of a liberal agenda, ‘political correctness’ may appear threatening for those who hold other views, seeming to illiberally close down opinions that do not conform. Heritage can be used to engender communal identity but equally it can be divisive. If the UK is a divided nation, can it have a united heritage? One response to Brexit is to say we need to push an agenda based around diversity and inclusivity even harder, that if we include more people in the liberal heritage project, it can be used to build a more unified sense of place and nation. The starting point for an alternative strategy would be to acknowledge that heritage is contested. In turn this suggests further changing heritage processes, the sharing of some professional authority and creation of space for debate. Resultant modes of collaborative and dialogic working have been discussed in the heritage literature for some time (see e.g. Harrison, 2013; Pendlebury, Townshend, & Gilroy, 2004) and are very familiar to planners (see e.g. Healey, 1997). However, following Rivero’s (2017) discussion, productive deliberation is difficult; more communication does not necessarily mean greater understanding. As he states

“Merely insisting, however, that we engage populism in whatever form it takes as part of the ongoing democratic project offers no guidance in how to do so. It

leaves outstanding the perplexing question of how we might confront a fragmented public and rebuild a common ground on foundations of distrust and resentment” (492)

Alternatively we might consider an institutional design that acknowledges divisions and fault lines through a creative process of agonism (see e.g. Mouffe, 2000), using heritage to debate the various claims made over the past, recognising that mutually incompatible positions are a legitimate and necessary part of democracy (Kisić, 2017). While heritage often reproduces hegemonic structures by its framing of historic inequalities and social structures, it can also provide a platform for questioning them, stimulating debate and learning. Brexit feeds into a debate about re-inscribing, rethinking and reframing heritage in different political realms. If the divided referendum vote is indeed a sign that the UK is in some ways a divided nation, how can we make sure heritage will be used as a platform for debate, to publicly unpack what heritage is used for and what it does (Veldpaus & Pendlebury, 2017)? The use of heritage to create a sense of belonging to a shared past or future, is equally as entrenched in liberal as anti-liberal discourses, depending on who belongs and to what. Rootedness and identity can be conservative, progressive, liberal, neo-liberal and more. But if we are to argue for a liberal vision of heritage we need to better acknowledge, and challenge, the other realms of heritage that exist.

References

- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Ashworth, G. J. (2006). Editorial: On Icons and ICONS. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12(5), 392–393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527250600821456>
- Bevan, R. (2006). *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*. Reaktion Books.
- Bhambra, G. K. (2013, October 1). Viewpoint: The Dangerous Politics of Belonging. Retrieved August 2, 2017, from <http://discoversociety.org/2013/10/01/the-dangerous-politics-of-belonging/>

- Campbell, H. (2016). Lessons from the UK's Brexit vote: will it prove to be a fork in the road or just the same old cul-de-sac? *Planning Theory & Practice*, 17(4), 489–493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2016.1239731>
- Clarke, A. (2016, December 7). 'We want our country back.' Retrieved August 2, 2017, from <https://themigrationist.net/2016/12/07/we-want-our-country-back/>
- Delingpole, J. (2016, December 22). Preserve us from a National Trust that's so achingly right-on. *Daily Mail Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-4057118/Preserve-National-Trust-s-achingly-right-says-James-Delingpole.html>
- Fortin, J. (2017, August 13). The Statue at the Center of Charlottesville's Storm. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/charlottesville-rally-protest-statue.html>
- Goodhart, D. (2004). Too diverse?, (95). Retrieved from <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/too-diverse-david-goodhart-multiculturalism-britain-immigration-globalisation>
- Goodhart, D. (2017). *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Harrison, R. (2013). *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. Routledge.
- Healey, P. (1997). *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*. UBC Press.
- Hewison, R. (1987). *The heritage industry: Britain in a climate of decline*. Methuen London.
- Jennings, W., & Stoker, G. (2017). Tilting Towards the Cosmopolitan Axis? Political Change in England and the 2017 General Election. *The Political Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12403>
- Jones, O. (2017, April 20). Brexitland: So much for the fractured nation – I haven't found it | Owen Jones. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/20/brexitland-fractured-nation-politicians-unite-labour>
- Kisić, V. (2017). *Governing Heritage Dissonance: Promises and Realities of Selected Cultural Policies*. Belgrade: European Cultural Foundation (ECF).
- Lowenthal, D. (1985). *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge University Press.
- May, S. (2017, June 16). What Can We Do With Dangerous Pasts. Retrieved August 2, 2017, from <https://heritage-futures.org/can-dangerous-pasts/>
- Mouffe, C. (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. Verso.
- Murray, D. (2017). *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Peck, J., Brenner, N., & Theodore, N. (2017). Actually existing neoliberalism. In D. Cahill, M. Konings, M. Cooper, & D. Primrose, *The Sage Handbook of Neoliberalism*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.ubc.ca/peck/files/2017/01/Actually-existing-neoliberalism3.0.pdf>
- Pendlebury, J., Townshend, T., & Gilroy, R. (2004). The Conservation of English Cultural Built Heritage: A Force for Social Inclusion? *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 10(1), 11–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1352725032000194222>
- Pochin, C. (2017, August 5). Here's what the national media has to say about Felbrigg Hall's volunteer controversy. *Eastern Daily Press*. Retrieved from <http://www.edp24.co.uk/news/here-s-what-the-national-media-has-to-say-about-felbrigg-hall-s-volunteer-controversy-1-5136799>

- Rivero, J. J. (2017). Making post-truth planning great again: confronting alternative facts in a fractured democracy. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 18(3), 490–493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2017.1333710>
- Saner, E. (2017, April 29). Renamed and shamed: taking on Britain's slave-trade past, from Colston Hall to Penny Lane. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/29/renamed-and-shamed-taking-on-britains-slave-trade-past-from-colston-hall-to-penny-lane>
- Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*. Abingdon, Oxon, UK ; New York, NY, USA: Taylor and Francis.
- Smith, M. (2017, August 1). YouGov | The “extremists” on both sides of the Brexit debate. Retrieved August 2, 2017, from <http://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/08/01/britain-nation-brexit-extremists/>
- Sykes, O., & Ludwig, C. (2016). Aftermath: the consequences of the result of the 2016 EU referendum for heritage conservation in the United Kingdom. *Town Planning Review*, 87(6), 619–625.
- The Heritage Alliance. (2017). Brexit and Heritage Briefing. The Heritage Alliance. Retrieved from <http://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/tha-website/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Brexit-and-Heritage-Briefing-FINAL-with-Royal-Society-Report.pdf>
- Veldpaus, L., & Pendlebury, J. (2017, August 21). Upon which pasts do we build our future? Retrieved from <https://heritagevalue.wordpress.com/2017/08/21/upon-which-pasts-do-we-build-our-future/>
- Webber, R., & Burrows, R. (forthcoming). *The Predictive Postcode? An Alternative Account of Social Change in Britain*. London: SAGE.
- Winlow, S., Hall, S., & Treadwell, J. (2017). *The Rise of the Right: English Nationalism and the Transformation of Working-class Politics*. Policy Press.

-
- ⁱ This commentary has been developed subsequent to an ESRC IAA funded Heritage & Brexit Workshop on the 29th of March organised by the authors. Whilst the views presented are our own we gratefully acknowledge the insightful contributions from all attendees at that event from both the heritage sector and academia. As well as the long-term cultural implications of Brexit the event focused upon immediate policy ramifications. For discussions of these see Sykes and Ludwig (2016) and in particular, from the briefing prepared by The Heritage Alliance (2017), an umbrella group for heritage-sector organisations.
- ⁱⁱ Goodhart is a British left-of-centre commentator who, nevertheless, became something of a pariah on the left for arguing during the 2000s of the dangers of disconnection from traditional working class voters and a loss of social cohesion by the Labour leadership and its liberal approach to immigration (see Goodhart, 2004) .
- ⁱⁱⁱ We acknowledge that whilst Goodhart's focus is upon 'somewheres' and 'anywheres' he does also have a category of 'inbetweeners'.